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FOLLOWING TELEGRAM FROM TEL AVIV DATED JANUARY 14, 1978
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TO YOU: QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 0662

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, SCUL, IS

SUBJECT: PROTESTANT CLERGY EXPRESS CONCERN OVER NEW ANTI-PRO-
SELYTIZING LAW

SUMMARY: A GROUP OF CONCERNED AMERICAN PROTESTANT CLERGYMEN
CALLED ON THE AMBASSADOR JANUARY 12 TO EXPRESS THEIR
CONCERN ABOUT THE PASSAGE OF A VAGUELY WORDED NEW CRIMINAL
LAW AMEDMENT OUTLAWING THE OFFERING OF BRIBES OR MATERIAL
BENEFITS AS INDUCEMENT TO CONVERSIONS.ALTHOUGH PROSE-
LYTIZING IS HARDLY A PROBLEM IN ISRAEL, THE NEW LAW
REFLECTS ORTHODOX RESENTMENT AGAINST THE PARTICIPATION
OF SMALL MESSIANIC JEWISH GROUPS IN CHRISTIAN CHURCH AND
SOCIAL ACTIVITIES. THE CHRISTIANS FEAR THAT THE LAW WILL
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ENCOURAGE HARASSMENT OF CHRISTIANS BY ORTHODOX JEWISH
GROUPS. ISRAELIS, IN TURN, ARE BECOMING INCREASINGLY
AWARE THAT THE ANTI-MISSIONARY INTENT OF THE LAW COULD
HURT THEIR INTERNATIONAL IMAGE. SOME JEWISH GROUPS,
PARTICULARLY THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE, ARE
BEGINNING TO COOPERATE WITH CHURCH LEADERS IN
JOINT EFFORTS TO CONSTRAIN THE POTENTIAL INTERNAL AND

INTERNATIONAL DAMAGES OF THIS LEGISLATION. DEPARTMENT
CAN ANTICIPATE RAPIDLY ESCALATING PUBLIC CONCERN
IN THE U.S. ABOUT THE LAW. END SUMMARY.

1. A GROUP OF AMERICAN CLERGY REPRESENTING THE UNITED
CHRISTIAN COUNCIL IN ISRAEL CALLED ON THE AMBASSADOR
ON JANUARY 12 TO EXPRESS THEIR GRAVE CONCERN OVER
THE KNESSET'S PASSAGE ON DECEMBER 27 OF AN AMENDMENT
TO THE PENAL CODE ORDINANCE WHICH MAKES INDUCEMENT
OR ATTEMPTED INDUCEMENT TO RELIGIOUS CONVERSION
BY OFFERING OR PROMISING MONEY, GIFTS, OR OTHER
MATERIAL BENEFITS A CRIME PUNISHABLE BY FIVE YEARS
IMPRISONMENT OR A FINE OF IL 50,000. SIMILARLY, A
PERSON ACCEPTING SUCH BENEFITS AS INDUCEMENT TO CONVERT
OR TO HAVE ANOTHER PERSON CONVERTED (SUCH AS PARENTS
DIRECTING OR PERMITTING THE CONVERSION OF THEIR CHILDREN)
IS SIMILARLY LIABLE TO IMPRISONMENT AND FINES. THE
LAW WILL COME INTO FORCE IN APRIL 1978 AND THE
MISSIONARIES HOPE TO USE THE INTERVENING TIME TO LOBBY
FOR ITS ABOLITION OR AMENDMENT.

2. THE GROUP CITED THE EXPLANATORY COMMENTARY OF
RABBI YEHUDA MEIR ABRAMOVITZ (MK-AGUDAT YISRAEL), THE
SPONSOR OF THE LAW, AS PROOF OF ITS ANTI-CHRISTIAN
INTENT OF EVENTUALLY ENDING ALL MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES
IN ISRAEL. THEY WERE ALSO UPSET BY WHAT THEY SEE
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AS SLANDEROUS AND FALSE STATEMENTS VOICED AGAINST
THE CHIRSTIAN MISSIONARIES DURING THE KNESSET
DEBATE, ACCUSING THEM: A. OF HAVING ENTICED MEMBERS
OF THE ISRAELI ARMED FORCES TO CONVERT; B. OF HAVING
AIDED PERSONS TO EMIGRATE IN RETURN FOR CONVERSION;
AND C. OF HAVING USED MONEY, JOB OFFERS AND OTHER
MATERIAL INDUCEMENTS TO ENCOURAGE CONVERSIONS.

3. ALTHOUGH THE GROUP CALLING ON THE AMBASSADOR
CONSISTED ONLY OF BAPTIST AND MENONITE MINISTERS,
THEY SAID THAT THE CATHOLIC, ANGLICAN AND GREEK
ORTHODOX CHURCHES WERE SIMILARLY UPSET BY THE LAW,
FEARING THAT ITS LOOSE WORDING COULD BE USED BY
JEWISH RELIGIOUS MILITANTS AS LICENSE TO PROVOKE
INCIDENTS, TO ENCOURAGE POLICE INVESTIGATIONS AND
HARASSMENT OF MISSIONARIES AND THEIR FAMILIES, AND
TO HARASS ARAB CHRISTIANS IN PARTICULAR. THEY VIEW
THE LAW AS A SERIOUS THREAT TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM
AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN ISRAEL AND SAY THAT THEY AND
THEIR CHURCHES WILL MAKE THIS CONCERN KNOWN TO THE
US GOVERNMENT, THE WHITE HOUSE, CONGRESS, AND THEIR
CONGREGATIONS BACK HOME.

4. AT THIS TIME, HOWEVER, THE MISSIONARIES SAID THAT THEY DID NOT WANT TO UNLEASH AN ANTI-ISRAELI CAMPAIGN, BUT WOULD SEEK TO ENLIST ALL POSSIBLE MEANS, INCLUDING INTERNATIONAL LOBBYING TO PERSUADE THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT TO ANNUL OR AMEND THIS LEGISLATION. THEY ALSO WANTED TO STRESS THE POINT THAT THE EVANGELICAL CHURCHES WERE AMONG THE STRONGEST SUPPORTERS OF ISRAEL IN THE US BY WAY OF ILLUSTRATING THE INTENSITY OF CHRISTIAN CONCERN THEY QUOTED THE APOSTOLIC VICAR OF THE LATIN CHURCH IN JERUSALEM MSGR. HANNA KALDANY AS SAYING THAT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH VIEWS THIS LEGISLATION AS "FIRST STEP TOWARD CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION IN ISRAEL," AND THEN SPECULATED
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THAT THE MATTER MAY BE RAISED BY THE POPE AT HIS MEETING WITH FM DAYAN. THE GROUP SOUGHT THE AMBASSADOR'S SYMPATHY, MORAL SUPPORT, AND ADVICE--BUT WAS NOT ASKING FOR FORMAL INTERVENTION BY THE US GOVERNMENT AT THIS TIME.

5. COMMENT: THE PASSEGE OF THE ANTI-PROSELYTIZING LAW REFLECTS A PROFOUND AND TRADITIONAL JEWISH ABHORRENCE OF PROSELYTIZING SHARED BY BOTH RELIGIOUS AND NON-RELIGIOUS PERSONS. THUS DESPITE THE FACT THAT OPEN PROSELYTIZING OR CONVERSION OF JEWS TO CHRISTIANITY IS VIRTUALLY NON-EXISTANT IN ISRAEL, (WHILE A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF CONVERSIONS TO JUDAISM OCCUR) AND NOTWITHSTANDING THAT PROBABLY AN ISRAELI MAJORITY CONSIDERS THIS LAW AS UNNECESSARY AND MISCHIEVOUS, THE LIKELIHOOD OF IT BEING ANNULLED IS SMALL. THE LAW WAS ENACTED HURRIEDLY AND ALMOST SURREPTITIIOUSLY IN LATE DECEMBER OVER THE VIGOROUS OPPOSITION OF SOME OUTSPOKEN MEMBERS OF THE KNESSET LIKE AMNON RUBENSTEIN (DMC) AND SHULAMIT ALONI. THOUGH TECHNICALLY A "PRIVATE MEMBER" BILL, IT RECEIVED STRONG SUPPORT FROM LIKUD. RUBENSTEIN TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT HE CONSIDERED THE WHOLE EPISODE "SCANDALOUS." ALTHOUGH THE LAW OSTENSIBLY DEALS WITH THE QUESTION OF BRIBERY AND CONVERSION, IT IS SO BROADLY DRAWN THAT IT COULD CONCEIVABLY BE ENVOCKED AGAINST TOTALLY INNOCENT ACTIVITIES BY CHRISTIAN MINISTERS, SUCH AS INVITING JEWS TO SOCIAL GATHERINGS OR PROVIDING EDUCATION FOR JEWISH CHILDREN IN MISSION SCHOOLS. NO ACTUAL CONVERSION NEED TAKE PLACE. THE UNDERLYING MOTIVE REFLECTS THE RESENTMENT OF THE ORTHODOX COMMUNITY NOT ONLY AGAINST CONVERSION, BUT MORE PARTICULARLY
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AGAINST THE PARTICIPATION OF SMALL BUT CONSPICUOUS GROUPS OF MESSIANIC JEWS IN CHRISTIAN SERVICES AND COMMUNITY LIFE. MANY OF THESE PARTICIPANTS ARE YOUNG PEOPLE COMING FROM ORTHODOX FAMILIES.

6. THE GOI IS INCREASINGLY BECOMING AWARE OF THE POTENTIALLY HOSTILE REACTION WHICH THE LAW MAY EVOKE ABROAD, ALTHOUGH THE CLERGYMEN HAVE HAD NO RESPONSE TO TWO LETTERS THEY HAVE SENT TO THE PRIME MINISTER. NOR HAVE THEY YET MET DIRECTLY WITH ANY MEMBER OF THE CABINET. AMERICAN JEWISH REPRESENTATIVES IN ISRAEL HAVE ALREADY BEGUN TO WORK WITH THE UNITED CHRISTIAN COUNCIL AND OTHER LEADING CHRISTIAN CLERGYMEN IN A JOINT EFFORT TO MINIMIZE THE DANGER OF A PUBLIC RELIGIOUS CONFLICT. LEADING ISRAELI LAWYERS AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS HAVE INDICATED THAT THE LAW WOULD BE APPLICABLE ONLY IN CLEAR AND SPECIFIC CASES OF BRIBERY OR ATTEMPTED BRIBERY, BUT THE MISSIONARIES ARE NOT REASSURED. HOWEVER, THEY HAVE BEEN INVITED BY THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE MINISTRY OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS ISRAEL LIPPIN AND THE MINISTRY DIRECTOR FOR CHRISTIAN AFFAIRS DAVID ROSSIN TO SUBMIT A LIST OF QUESTIONS ON THE APPLICATION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE LAW TO THE ATTORNEY GENERAL. HIS OFFICE, IN TURN, IS EXPECTED TO ISSUE ON THE BASIS OF THIS QUESTIONNAIRE AN OFFICIAL INTERPRETATION OF THE SPECIFIC APPLICABILITY OF THE LAW.

7. THE AMBASSADOR TOLD THE GROUP THAT HE SHARED THEIR CONCERN OVER THE POTENTIAL IMPACT AND USE OF THIS LAW AND THAT HE WOULD DISCREETLY MAKE KNOWN THIS CONCERN TO GOI. HE ALSO ASSURED THE MINISTERS THAT THE EMBASSY WAS ALWAYS READY TO BE HELPFUL SHOULD AMERICAN MISSIONARIES SEEK US GOVERNMENT PROTECTION AND ASSISTANCE.

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